Property Of
Sierra Historic Sites Assoc.
Library

THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

MADERA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

Volume III - Number 3 July, 1963

OUR FAMILY STORY

by ROSE THURMAN CHAPMAN and WILLIAM MELVIN
as told to NATHAN C. SWEET

Our grandmother, Louisa Reese, arrived in San Francisco from Neuhaus, Germany, in 1859, sixteen years old. Two sisters came also; Doretta, Mrs. Schneider; and Marie, Mrs. Holtzmueller, but whether they came first or last, we do not know.

At eighteen, Louisa married our grandfather, George Muller, a hatter by trade, who came to America and acquired citizenship in 1854.

His naturalization paper, signed by Secretary of State Marcy, gives his age 23 years, his height five feet, five inches, with high forehead, blue eyes, small nose and mouth, light hair and round face and chin. He signed his name in a good script with the final flourish common at that time. On the back of the document, a stamp indicates that he returned to Germany, May 10, 1855, arriving back in New York, Oct. 25, 1856.

Our mother, Mary Muller, was born in San Francisco in 1866. Her father died when she was a year old and a year later, Grandmother married John Krohn who kept a grocery store at Stockton and Pine Streets in San Francisco.

In 1873, a year of depression, John Krohn decided to make a change. Hearing of a business opportunity in Crane Valley, he investigated and on his return stopped at Michael's at Texas Flat, a mile west of Coarse Gold Gulch as it was then called: Charles Michael persuaded him to become his partner in business. Returning home he packed his belongings, shipped them by rail to Berenda, where unloaded on the railroad platform they stayed, come rain and shine, until they were hauled by team and wagon to the new home. Having been rained on, Grandmother was not pleased with their condition upon arrival; by this time she had five children to transfer from city living to life in a frontier settlement in the southern mines.

Fortunately, Mr. Michael, a bachelor, proved to be a well-educated, kindly man. A pioneer of 1850, born about 1820 in Wurtemberg, Germany, he was well established socially and financially. He was occasionally present at social events in Millerton, the county seat.

The year of their arrival was a period of change in the Sierra foothills. Previously, business was with hundreds of placer miners scattered along the streams from the San Joaquin River northward. Now, lode mining was to replace the exhausted placers. Tempo of the lumber industry increased with the construction

(Continued on Page 2)



Charles Melvin, as photographed in San Francisco, early 1880's.

of larger mills, but the building of the flume adversely affected the teaming along the roads.

Livestock had always been an important part of the economy, but it also changed with the passage of the "No Fence" law requiring stockmen to keep their animals out of the San Joaquin Valley grain fields. Many changed from cattle to sheep which were driven to the mountains every summer in countless thousands, thereby consuming much of the grazing local settlers depended upon.

Their home was the successor to the Roney and Thornburg trading post dating back to 1851, when these merchants had moved over to Texas Flat from Agua Fria, near Mariposa, at the outbreak of the Mariposa Indian War. On the return trip, the wagon train was attacked by Indians while passing through Fine Gold Gulch and the teamsters killed.

Texas Flat, with the Roney and Thornburg store as the polling place, was a precinct in the first election after statehood, fall, 1851. There were other stores in the neighborhood during the fifties, the last being Walker's which moved to Fine Gold in 1859. In 1871, a competitor appeared on Coarse Gold Gulch, locating a short distance upstream from Michael on the Burguet property. This was the firm of T.J. Allen and T.T. Strombeck whose store was the polling place in 1872 for the newly-formed Coarse Gold precinct. The building was torn down, 1874, and moved to Fresno Flats (Oakhurst), leaving the field to Michael and Krohn.

Mr. Michael's business was general merchandise and refreshment for the wayfarer. Business generally was good up to 1877, when drought occurred all over California to an extent that has never been equalled since for a single year. Many previously prosperous men went down to defeat in that fateful year. Fortunately, Michael and Krohn survived, and in the next couple of years, a new source of income appeared which has been the main reliance of the merchants of the locality from that day to this, namely, tourist travel to Yosemite Valley.

In 1879, a new road was completed from Madera, through Coarse Gold, to Big Tree Station (Wawona). A hotel called the St. Charles was erected in Coarse Gold Gulch by the partners and was ready for business when the

spring travel started in 1880.

In her diary, written last of June, 1880, Tillie Gilmore Brown mentions that they, "halted at a station, the hotel part of which was opened for the first time this spring. Mr. Foster is the gentleman in charge." From this we know that a manager was employed at first to get the hotel under way.

On February 22, 1882, a ball was held at the hotel. Mother, now sixteen, and Mr. Michael were to lead the grand march. Mr. R. P. Mace, owner of the Yosemite Hotel in Madera, consented to be master-of-ceremonies. As he was a large man, a special chair was imported from San Francisco for his comfort which we have preserved.

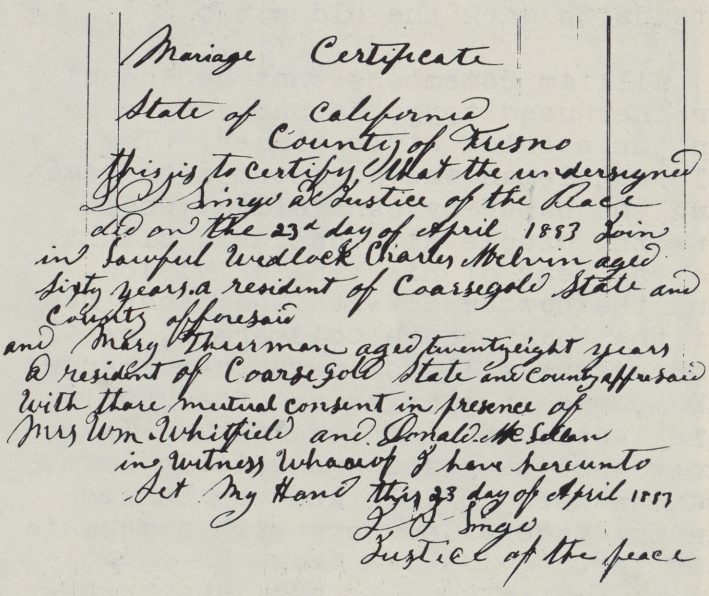
The day of the celebration, Mr. Michael died at the old home at Texas Flat; Mother and Grandmother having lost a dear friend, had no desire to attend the affair.

In 1884, at the St. Charles, Mother married E. Brockway Thurman. For a time they lived at Texas Flat and Rose was born there in 1886. Her father belonged to the most glamorous profession of his day, that of driver of a stage coach drawn by a six-horse team. At times they lived in Yosemite Valley, if his run originated there, and were staying at the Sentinel Hotel in the Valley when Rose was baptised, nine months old. Her godmother was Mrs. Cook, wife of the manager. At some later date, Rose remembers falling off the bridge that crossed the Merced River near the hotel.

At another time, her father's run started at Madera and they lived there for a while. The Thurmans were from Hornitas. Brock had two sisters, Mary and Jennie; and two brothers, James and William. They were not of the family of W. H. Thurman who was the first sheriff of Madera County. James Thurman had a ranch home, three-and-a-half miles south of Coarse Gold. In 1876, Brock had spent the summer driving a team on the E. W. Chapman ranch close to Madera. He needed long experience handling horses before he could expect to be employed as a "whip" as stage drivers were called.

Unfortunately, this marriage ended in divorce and, in April of 1893, Mother married Charles Melvin. He was a miner by trade - hard rock mining. Coming west from Wisconsin, he worked in Virginia City for a time, then continued on to San Francisco. He decided to go back to Wisconsin, but a chance meeting with an old friend of Virginia City days changed his plans. His friend was James B. Lang who, in partnership with Duncan McLellan, had developed and sold the Golden Chariot Mine in San Diego County, and were developing mines near Deadwood Gulch which

(Continued on Page 4)



Mariage Certificate

State of California
County of Fresno

This is to certify That the undersigned L. S. Lingo a Justice of the Peace did on the 23rd day of April 1893 Join in Lawful Wedlock Charles Melvin aged Sixty years a resident of Coarsegold State and County aforesaid and Mary Thurman aged twenty eight years a resident of Coarse Gold State and County aforesaid With their mutual consent in presence of Mrs Wm Whitfield and Donald McLean

ing Witness Whereof I have hereunto Set My Hand this 23 day of April 1893

L S Lingo
Justice of the peace

L. S. Lingo performed the marriage ceremony for Mary & Charles Melvin, April 23, 1893.

joins Coarse Gold Gulch a short distance above today's Coarse Gold Inn.

Charles Melvin entered this partnership and so moved to Deadwood. Later, Lang dropped out and Melvin and McLellan continued. The mines were called the Hawkeye, Laura May and Burne. A newspaper article of August 15, 1888, in the Fresno Expositor, written by Archie McDonald of Coarse Gold, states, "that Melvin, McLellan and Lang have been working nine or ten months on their claim and have constructed a 600 foot tunnel, also that Haggin and Hearst are working the Texas Flat Mine."

The miners had a cabin and stamp mill along the creek. After his marriage, father enlarged the cabin, including a room at one end for Duncan McLellan. A large tree grew at the side of the cabin. Rose was seven years old when mother moved to Deadwood. Henry was born June 19, 1894, and William, Sept. 16, 1900. The cabin has been torn down and the stamp mill replaced by a barn, but the tree under which we grew up still stands to mark the old site.

William remembers that he and his brother used to go to Duncan's room in the evening after dinner. The old gentleman was accustomed to reading the paper by candlelight, holding the candle with one hand slightly to the rear of his line of vision, and the newspaper with the other hand. If the boys became boisterous, as youngsters will, he never reprimanded them, merely blowing out the candle and leaving them in the dark. They knew what he meant and quietly left. Duncan died in 1911 and was buried in the Madera Cemetery with a masonic service.

Years later, Henry and William built their present home lower down on the point where Greaser Gulch joins Deadwood. Rose and William live there today, Henry having passed away March 20, 1959.

In 1919, Rose married Harry Chapman, the step-son of E.W. Chapman by whom her father had been employed in 1876. Harry came to Coarse Gold as superintendant of the Texas Flat Mine. He was a mining engineer graduate, class of 1893, University of California. Later his work took them to San Diego County, Siskiyou County, Nevada City and other mines on the mother lode. In the early thirties, ill health forced his retirement, dying July 24, 1934, and leaving two children by a previous marriage in Prescott, Arizona. Father died October 15, 1920, and Mother on April 29, 1946. All are buried in the family plot across the creek from the old home.

We have truly been a mining family almost to the present, as Henry and William operated a custom stamp mill on Deadwood Creek during World War Two. The heavy concrete foundation can still be seen along the road as you approach our home. The Laura May and Burne mines are still in family ownership.

Charles Melvin's arrival in San Francisco, mentioned earlier, was not his first visit to that city. As a boy of twelve, he had accompanied his father, Joseph Melvin, to California during the goldrush. They lived in Watertown, Wisconsin, Charles being the youngest of sixteen children, all the rest being girls. He and his father came by way of the Isthmus where Joseph contracted a fever. They continued on to the El Dorado diggings but, the disease persisting, they returned to Watertown where Joseph died shortly after.

As soon as Charles was old enough, he started west on his own, resolved to be a miner. In later years, he told of a covered wagon trip and of

stage coach journey from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Helena, Montana, Idaho, Nevada and Bodie, California, carrying with him, an 1850 model Colt, cap and ball revolver. He became a prospector, developer and mine promoter, operating stamp mills and concentrating plants in Montana, finally settling down with family and partner on Deadwood Gulch.

Miner partnerships were sometimes a quite special relationship. Bret Harte, in his stories of the mother lode, gives one the feeling of that relationship, and which existed between Father and Duncan and between our whole family. We believe the sentiment is apparent in our group as we sit together on the cabin steps.



Charles Melvin is seated against the tree at the left, while Henry Melvin, Duncan McLellan, William Melvin and Rose Thurman Chapman are together with Mary Muller Melvin above them approximately 1902 or 1903.

MADERA COUNTY ROAD RECORDS

by DOUG HOUSTON
(Continued from Number 2, Vol. III)

Let us continue with our proposed road which will take us from the San Joaquin River to the Chowchilla River.

"....An established and known road is needed in the direction of Stockton." Petitioners also, "Further represent that they are compelled to pay taxes for roads which is placed upon those rarely used by your petitioners." M.B. Lewis is surveyor and viewer with Barton Lomax and Smith Norris as additional viewers.

On Oct. 14, 1869, Lewis filed a map of his survey. It shows the San Joaquin River at the bottom of the page and the Chowchilla River at the top, also "Taylor's Branch" and "Rea's Branch." It bears a north point, but, as usual, no section lines. The section 34 referred to is about 3 miles down the San Joaquin River from Herndon and when section lines are projected in from that point, they show the road surveyed roughly parallels the Southern Pacific Railroad at a distance of about 2 miles to the southwest. Taylor's Branch is apparently what is now known as Berenda Creek and Rea's Branch, Dry Creek. "Minter's," is, in all probability, a misconception of Minturn's, as the map shows the northern end of the road to be in the immediate neighborhood of the old Minturn Ranch. Existing records show a Jonas Minturn as a landowner in that vicinity in 1872. On the south bank of the Chowchilla River, close to the old ranch, is a small burial plot with a stone to Jonas Minturn, 1819-1884, also stones to Abby West Minturn, 1820-1899, and Rowland R. Minturn, 1845-1894.

A rather interesting item is the affidavit of posting notices at "Jones Store" and Monterodonda." We have no record to show location of this last, but I am inclined to believe that it refers to a large grove of cottonwood trees, many acres in extent, that grew along the Fresno River just west of the old Bonita Ranch, not Bonita Gin, which for no known reason was called the Monte.

This grove was a favorite picnic ground for Madera in the horse and buggy days and was in existence well into the 20's. It was all Miller & Lux holdings and they had a small ranch for working cattle west of and probably predating the Bonita. This was known as the Monte Ranch, probably derived from Monterodonda, which could go back to the early Spanish.

A note on the binder says, "Established, Nov. 2, 1869," and later references to "The Landrum Road" indicate that it was built. It evidently withered away after the construction of the railroad, as no traces of it remain today.

Next date we have is a petition filed Nov. 1, 1869, for a road from Jones Store to Cathey's Ranch. The petition itself is quite a literary effort, of which we present the following samples: "We, the undersigned citizens - prompted by sectional pride and pecuniary interest - view with regret the deplorable condition of the most important road to the entire population of Fresno County west of the San Joaquin (River) - leading from the plains to the saw mills - and into an inexhaustible pine and redwood section of the country...."

M.B. Lewis is again on the job and leaves us copious field notes and the customary map minus section lines

r corners. He does show the road as passing up "Fine Gold Gulch" and crossing "Wheel Barrow Branch" near "Walker Mountain."

We know from existing records that Jones Store was on the northwest side of the San Joaquin River opposite the present town of Friant. Fine Gold Gulch can be located on any topographical map, but Cathey's, or Daniel Cathey's Ranch is another matter. It is mentioned in several other proceedings and appears to be somewhere near the foot of Crane Valley, but no definite location can be determined. While the name is rather appealing, we are afraid that Wheel Barrow Branch is completely forgotten today.

May 2, 1870, shows the petition of Jos. Borden et al, for a road from the "Arcola or Alabama Settlement to intersect the main sawmill oad about 300 yards below the residence of M.B. Lewis." It cites that, "The rapid settlement and peopleing of this section make large quantities of timber necessary," and that this road will benefit the settler on the Fresno, Chowchilla and Lower Mariposa Creek as much as the Alabama Settlement.

M.B. Lewis is surveyor and on Aug. 1, 1870, files a rather interesting map, this time complete with section lines. He shows the road surveyed as joining the Landrum Road at a point where it would cross the present Avenue 12, thence east along the route of Avenue 12, passing J. Borden's house, to the present S.P. Railroad crossing just south of old Borden Station; thence northeast in an almost direct line to a point close to the present junction of Roads 400 and 406; thence past Mudget's house (later Bates Station); n past the house of Captain Mace later, builder of the Yosemite Hotel at Madera) to a point on the Jones Store to Crane Valley Road near the M.B. Lewis house.

From Lewis' map, the road seems to bear slowly to the east of the present 406 and 207, terminating at a point about 2½ miles east of old Kelshaw Corners; but section lines projected 15 or 20 miles from a single point can wander an amazing distance from true lines, and we are inclined to believe this road closely followed the present road past old Bates Station to Kelshaw Corners.

The map also shows the old stage road crossing the Fresno River a little above the Adobe Ranch, passing E.I. Hildreth's close to the present Wide Awake Ranch and terminating at Jones Store on the San Joaquin, also the Saw Mill Road from Jones' Store to M.B. Lewis'. Map wrapper says, "Declared Public Highway Aug. 1, 1870."

Following this, we have the petition of S. A. Holmes et al, filed July 4, 1870, also of C. A. Reading, Nov. 7, 1870, and of Jonathan Rea and John C. Morton, both undated. These are for a road from the "Arcola Settlement" to "Firebaugh's Ferry." In almost identical wording they state that Firebaugh's is the head of navigation from which a large district including Arcola must receive freight; the present road is not a public highway and is in danger of being obstructed by fences; such a road will provide a direct route to Panoche Valley and the New Idria mines.

J.C. Walker, Esq., was appointed surveyor and viewer and Samuel Brown and R.P. Mace, viewers; the instrument of appointment being addressed from Millerton by Harry Dixon, Clerk, Feb. 8, 1871. There is no map, survey notes or viewers' report with this set of documents. There is a

(Continued on Page 8)

"Road Notice" addressed to 60 names of land owners affected, including Henry Miller and Charles Lux, stating intent to petition; also a testimonial from J. W. Ferguson who, "being duly sworn, deposes and says: That he is one of the publishers of the Fresno Weekly Expositor, a newspaper published at Millerton, Fresno County...and that the road notice hereto attached has been published in said newspaper 6 times commencing with the 28th day of September, A.D. 1870...," and an affidavit of posting notices at Monterodonda, Mann's blacksmith shop and Hely's blacksmith shop.

There is also a notice to "William Faymonville, Esq., Agent of Henry Miller and Charles Lux," of intent to petition and a protest from Miller & Lux by Faymonville, stating that such a road will require nine miles of fence on each side at $800 per mile for construction and maintenance and they will claim $8000 damages if road is built.

There is no indication what action was taken on this, but a deed to Fresno County from Henry Miller and Charles Lux for a right of way over what is now most of the Firebaugh road was not recorded until May 5, 1886. It would seem that the prospect of an $8000 damage claim may have somewhat delayed proceedings.

From the descriptions in the petitions and posting notices, this road starts at the "Junction of the Landrum Road and the road from Arcola to Lewis' ranch," it then follows the route of the present Avenue 12 to the present Road 21, thence southwesterly to Firebaugh's.

Viewing the San Joaquin River today at any point below the Mendota Dam, it is difficult to visualize it as a channel of navigation, but, during high water, freight was delivered by boat to Firebaugh until the early part of this century. I can recall, as a child, seeing a steamboat moored there at the bank of Miller & Lux's store which was built on the bank of a deep channel with a back porch projecting over the water to serve as a pier. My father grain-farmed land near Madera leased from Miller & Lux and, in common with other M & L lessees, could obtain a year's credit from the general store at Firebaugh. This occasioned several trips a year with two-horse team and spring wagon for a load of groceries and general supplies. These trips were something of an event, often participated in by the whole family, involving an early start, several hours at Firebaugh for shopping and refreshment for man and beast, with arrival home late in the afternoon. It was on one of these occasions that the writer saw the steamboat and on another that he met and was introduced to Henry Miller who shook hands with him very democratically.

MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

Editor. . . . . .Jo Ann Badeaux
Managing
Editor . . . . . Nathan C. Sweet
Contributing
Editor . . . . . Doris E. Foster
Contributing
Editor . . . . . .Doug Houston

MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN is published quarterly in January, April, July and October by the Madera County Historical Society, P. O. Box 478, Madera, California. Subscription, 50¢ per copy, $2.00 per year, is included in membership in the Society. Please credit the "Madera County Historian" when reproducing any part

---